

# ***FACT SHEET***

## **PCBs in Caulk: Possible Risks**



### What are PCBs?

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) are a group of man-made chemicals widely used in industrial and construction materials between 1950 and 1978. They were used in electrical products such as transformers and fluorescent light ballasts and in building materials including caulk and sealant. Production stopped in 1977 due to concerns regarding possible harmful health and environmental effects. PCBs are toxic and stay in the environment for a long time. They can easily move between air, water and soil.

### Where are the PCBs in Caulk Found in Buildings?

PCBs were used in the caulk in older schools and other public buildings around window and door frames, brick, and expansion joints.

### How Could I get Exposed to PCBs in Caulk?

The general population normally has low levels of PCBs in their body from various environmental exposures. PCBs can be inhaled from air, ingested in food and water, or absorbed from contact with contaminated materials. The most common way people are exposed is through food sources, such as fish, meat and dairy products. When materials, such as caulk, that contain PCBs is disturbed or breaks down with age, vapors or dust that contains PCBs may be generated resulting in possible exposures to building occupants. However, the link between PCBs in caulk and exposure to PCBs in air or dust is not well understood. Workers who repair or take apart products containing PCBs have a higher risk of exposure.

### What are the Health Effects of Exposure to PCBs in Caulk?

PCBs have been linked to disorders of the endocrine, reproductive, immune and nervous systems. They are a probable cause of cancer linked to kidney, liver and thyroid cancers. Low level exposures such as those possibly caused by PCBs in caulk in buildings, has not been proven to cause the effects listed above. Still, it is unclear what levels may cause health effects so it is best to decrease exposure as much as possible. EPA is conducting new research to better understand the risks posed by exposure to caulk containing PCBs.

## How Can Exposure to PCBs in Buildings be Reduced?

- Improve the ventilation.
- Use a damp or wet cloth to clean surfaces.
- Clean often to reduce dust.
- Use HEPA vacuums.
- Wash hands often and before eating and drinking.
- Keep people out of areas where caulk is in poor condition (peeling, cracking).
- Seal or remove the caulk that is in poor condition.



## Should Buildings be Tested for PCBs in Caulk?

There is no requirement to test for PCBs in caulk. However, for buildings/schools built or remodeled between 1950 and 1978, CT DPH & CT DEP recommend:

- Testing caulk before doing renovations and repairs.
- Testing caulk inside the building that is peeling or cracking.

## What Should be Done if PCBs are Found?

If PCBs are found in a building, IT IS REQUIRED BY FEDERAL LAW that steps be taken to decrease any potential exposure and to remove and dispose of the PCBs in accordance with local, state and federal laws. PCBs should be removed by trained professionals using protective equipment and proper disposal procedures.

## For More information:

CT Department of Public Health: 860-509-7740

<http://www.ct.gov/dph/environmentalhealth>

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/hazard/tsd/pcbs/pubs/caulk/index.htm>

CT Department of Environmental Protection PCB Program: 860-424-3368

<http://www.ct.gov/dep/pcb>

Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ATSDR):

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/tp17.html>

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/phs17.html>

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts17.html>